

LATE TESTIMONY



HCR 174

**REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO CONVENE A TASK  
FORCE AND ESTABLISH A PILOT PROJECT TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF  
NATIVE HAWAIIAN CHILDREN IN CHILD CUSTODY PROCEEDINGS**

House Committee on Human Services & Housing

March 20, 2008

9:30 a.m.

Room 329

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The Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports HCR 174. Our interest in this legislation is primarily based on our concern that 52% of the children placed in foster care in Hawai'i are of Native Hawaiian ancestry.

Through our work over the past three years with the Governor's Advisory Board on Native Hawaiian Foster Parents and Kokua Ohana, a non-profit organization that is actively recruiting and providing support services to Native Hawaiian foster parents, we have become acutely aware of the myriad of problems relating to placement of Native Hawaiian foster children. Most problematic is that the trauma experienced by a Native Hawaiian child who is removed from the care and custody of his or her parents is often compounded when he or she is placed in a Non-Native foster home. Differences in cultural values and practices, or the lack thereof, diet, the general home environment, and other social factors can, in some cases, contribute more harm to the psychological, physical, and emotional well-being of the child.

When the bill to create the Native Hawaiian Child Welfare Act was first introduced in the Legislature three years ago, OHA opposed the bill because it lacked clarity in two major sections of the bill, the identity of the administrative entity and criteria by which kupuna would be selected to the tribunal. We recommended back then that the Legislature create a task force or work group that would bring all stakeholders to the table. This resolution will start the process of us doing that.

We recommend one amendment to the bill and that is to extend the time frame of the task force's work from one year to two. Within the State's Child Welfare System, the concept of creating the Native Hawaiian Child Welfare Act is a major piece of legislation, and as such, we do not feel that a one year time frame for the task force is adequate for it to accomplish its work.

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We urge your support for this resolution and look forward to fully participating in the task force's work should it be created.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to present testimony.